Radio Days

WTCC, WCCS and now WFCS at 107.7-- and anywhere at wfcsradio1077.com

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I hope you enjoy this initial edition of *Radio Days*.

Central Connecticut State University's radio club has been around a long time--since 1947--and lots of great anecdotes and stories are packed into those years. I encourage you to contribute some of your own radio club history for future editions of *Radio Days.*

So where to begin? At the present.

For alumni who would enjoy a more frequent link to Central or to their radio club days--something beyond the fun visits to the station during homecoming or the few ad hoc gatherings that happen during the year--there's good news: You can reconnect every week, because alumni make up a big part of today's WFCS sound.

Nearly every Sunday afternoon starting at 4 p.m. a crew of veteran alumni broadcasters bring their passion for choice rock and other selections to the WFCS airwaves. Not only do they offer premier programming, but they continue the radio club tradition of fun and camaraderie through their indepth knowledge of the music and the artists. And here's what may be an even bigger surprise: They've been part of the WFCS landscape for decades!

Meet Melissa Evans. Melissa started at Central in 1970. A psychology major with a minor in English, she eventually graduated in 1985 after juggling life's many demands and became a social worker, a position she recently retired from. But it was the Connecticut School of Broadcasting that launched her successful radio career in 1981.

She worked the midday shift at Southington's WNTY where she popularized a regular one-hour artist feature, highlighting groups such as Steely Dan and Bruce Springsteen. Later, Melissa did the overnight shift at WPLR in New Haven and then worked at Hartford's WCCC. Along the way she even did some DJ gigs at skating rinks and at Hartford-area nightclubs.

"It was like getting paid to go out," she recalls. But the creativity and free-form format of college radio drew her full circle back to Central where she just celebrated her 30th year on WFCS.

Melissa never arrives at the studio empty handed. She lugs a shopping bag bulging with hundreds of CDs, a well-worn encyclopedia of rock that she often refers to during her show and a feisty delivery that both engages and entertains. Melissa favors deep album cuts, even some obscure rock and local bands. Tune in to Melissa Sunday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Sharing that same time slot is Bill "Bungalow Bill" Walsh. Bill has graced the WFCS airwaves since 1978--36 years! "Gotta be some kind of record," he says. "I've watched this school grow and expand." Bungalow Bill's Sunday Spectrum show offers 60s and 70s rock selections not heard on commercial radio, spiced with comedy, jazz, rhythm and blues and Motown. Although Bill attended the University of Missouri, he's perhaps more invested in the Central community than most alumni. He put two daughters through Central. "The school got plenty of my money," he quipped.

Although listeners would never know, Bill's show is high tech. Much of his music is stored on an I-pod. The hand-size device holds an astounding 700 albums and plugs right into the studio's control board. "I can program a playlist in the order I want," Bill explained.

Still, he also mixes in real recordings--vinyl albums that he draws from his personal collection and from WFCS's vintage record library, many of the very same albums radio club alumni played decades ago. "Vinyl is warmer," is how Bill describes the fidelity. Serious rock aficionados will appreciate Bill's music variety. He logs all his songs, so it's unlikely you'll ever hear anything repeated.

In 1995, Bill worked at Middletown's WMRQ-AM doing sales and commercial production. When Bill isn't absorbed in music or on the air, he's a sales representative for the Connecticut Business and Industry Association.

At 6 p.m. Steve Strinie takes over. A 1983 marketing and communications graduate--and a radio club alumni--Steve has been a WFCS mainstay since 1992. He likes to promote the station as the place "where the music still matters." His captivating format proves it. Steve combines music with anecdotes about Central and popular topics that draw listeners. Between songs it's not unusual for Steve to mix things up with Bill or Melissa or some invited guests as they banter about music and life. He encourages listeners to call in.

Steve highlights his show with many well-known artists from the 60s, 70s and 80s but, like Bill, prefers selections that hardly get aired elsewhere. He's a big Moody Blues fan and twice a year devotes his entire two-hour show to that august group. The Moody Blues tribute usually starts before the show with a few toasts at Elmer's cafe with some friends (The Parma House, as many vintage alumni remember).

Radio club alumni who visit the station during October's homecoming know Steve for his generous technical assistance in helping the old-time jocks work the new-time studio equipment.

Steve has witnessed changes over the years at WFCS. The station went from the 10-watt mono FM at 90.1 to stereo FM on 97.9 and then to its present position on the dial at 107.7, now radiating at more than 35 watts. He also watched in frustration as student interest in the radio club fell during the past decade but he now sees a resurgence with the latest generation of students running the station. "What was once an unused facility is now heading in the right direction in a quick way," Steve observed.

Steve lives in Bristol, works as a professional surveyor and is a board member of a condominium association.

For those who thrive on high-octane rock, Tony Espinoza delivers with a jolt. Starting at 8 p.m., Tony's show--Black Sunday, as it's known--broadcasts the very best in heavy metal. A 2010 communications and psychology graduate, Tony credits his interest in attending Central from listening to WFCS as a teenager in high school. "I used to tape all the shows," Tony remembers. "Sometimes I sat in my parents car because it was the only way to pick up the station. Other times, I'd use coat hangers to get better reception."

Tony went from listening to stopping by the station and eventually becoming friendly with the WFCS staff. In 1995, he formed Catalyst, a heavy metal band that began practicing in his garage and then prospered professionally in the local area. In 1997, Tony began his studies at Central.

Tony marvels at his Sunday 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. slot, since it was the very same time he listened to heavy metal on WFCS during high school. Black Sunday offers metal selections that exhibit a band's talent, not excess, says Tony. "I play nothing extreme for extreme's sake. I try to put my personality into the show, something that resonates with me."

Tony recently became an information technology network specialist and believes his WFCS experience helped him land the job. During the interview, he discovered the manager also had a broadcasting background and that created some immediate chemistry.

So, tune in or click on WFCS each Sunday afternoon starting at 4 p.m. Let the music and these dedicated, Central broadcasters bring you back to campus and to all those good times. And don't forget to give them a call at (860) 832-1077 to request a song or just to hi and let them know your listening.

by Paul Koscak '73 WCCS, WFCS